



LET THEM WEAR CONVERSE

THE LEGENDARY COSTUME DESIGNER MILENA CANONERO TAKES ON 18TH-CENTURY FRANCE IN SOFIA COPPOLA'S LATEST FILM, MARIE ANTOINETTE. AND AS USUAL CANONERO IS NOT AFRAID TO CROSS-REFERENCE

Maria Antonia was the fifteenth child of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria. She did not like homework. She was a child of raw intelligence—capricious and flighty with a great artistic pulse. Her sister Johanna-Gabriella was the one who was supposed to marry the future king of France, but she died of smallpox in 1762. Maria Antonia's French was not excellent. She had not been groomed to become the queen of France. But at 14 years old, she was sent off to marry Louis XVI. Her name became Marie Antoinette; she got rid of her Alpine attire, stepped into her new French wardrobe, and tried to make the best of it. This displaced and homesick adolescent is the protagonist of Sofia Coppola's new film, *Marie Antoinette*—a story that has absolutely nothing to do with the French Revolution. According to Coppola and costume designer Milena Canonero, who worked tirelessly on the film, the queen of France was closer to us than we could imagine. In this case, using a lot of artistic license meant a little less lace, a little more Bow Wow Wow, and a witty arch shot of a pair of Converse next to 18th-century Manolos. Milena Canonero, the genius who outfitted the droogs of Kubrick's 1971 *A Clockwork Orange* in white because she felt "it was something in the air of London at the time," believes in cross-references. She believes that an

18th-century Goya painting can have a real conversation with the dramatic decadence of Sicily's Borbonic regime, that mediocre artwork can sometimes be inspirational, and that a box of Ladurée pastel-colored macaroons sent to her by the young director can set the mood for a film about the last queen of France. *Marie Antoinette* is a movie about young people. As critic Bernard-Henri Lévy says in his essay praising Coppola, "They are just a bunch of kids, real, actual kids, vivacious and mischievous, without any kind of fear or intuition, who play with their crowns like they would fool around during lunch break at school." Canonero is an icon of the costume world. She is currently working on her thirty-third film as a costume designer. Films include father Coppola's *The Godfather* trilogy, *Dick Tracy*, *Ocean's Twelve*, and a proud sweep of Stanley Kubrick movies (*The Shining*, *Barry Lyndon*, *A Clockwork Orange*). It is clear that this is one costume designer with the skill to put All-Stars on the old monarchy. **Chiara Barzini**

CHIARA BARZINI There's a lot of play between a contemporary aesthetic and 18th-century costumes. How did you navigate that?

MILENA CANONERO It was a delicate balance. And it was something Sofia wanted to create. She was very clear on that. The body language and some of the dialogue was very contemporary. At the same time she wanted to have a feeling of the period. Sofia's ideas were very personal and were taking the film in a direction where "feelings" were eternal, but the approach to them would be a combination of contemporary and period. The same idea applied to the music and style of cinematography.

CB There was a lot of talk at Cannes about the infamous shot with Converse shoes next to period shoes.

MC Some things in the movie were a bit tongue in cheek. It was to make a link with today's life. The way Sofia saw Marie Antoinette is a very modern, feminine, and intelligent way to see the journey into womanhood of a young girl who's been sent away from home to a totally unknown place where they speak a different language and where the modes and manners are quite different from the way she was brought up.

CB How was it to merge a European sensibility with an American one?

MC I wasn't thinking American or European, I was thinking of Sofia's vision, and her vision is not necessarily American. She's traveled a lot; she's lived in France a lot. It was mainly to work along the guidelines that she was giving us. She wanted to have a fresh approach, to paint a canvas. She did not want me to reproduce in a cinematic way the paintings of Marie Antoinette

that you see at Versailles.

CB It sounds like you recreated a very personal Versailles for yourselves.

MC Yes, it was a very personal Versailles, especially for Kirsten [Dunst] and Sofia. It was a kind of psychological projection of Versailles, in fact.

CB Did you use original pieces or did you redesign everything yourself?

MC The cut of the clothes was perfectly correct. But the way we chose the color combinations and the hair was inventive. And of course you always look at something that exists in the past and then depart from there.

CB What kind of materials did you use?

MC Beautiful silks, taffeta, and satin. But for Marie Antoinette I used original lace from the 18th century and I also used original waistcoats for the men, and the jewelry and accessories were sometimes used in a freer way. In those days all the ladies in the court would be covered in lace because it was the way to show how rich you were. They had much more jewelry than I used. I preferred the decorations of the dresses to be more graphic than lace. Even though I used beautiful period lace sometimes.

CB What actor or actress did you like dressing the most?

MC It was lots of fun dressing all the actors, but to dress them all was quite a challenge, because of the tight schedule, as they all had many changes. But I really had fun with Marianne Faithfull, Aurore Clément, and Judy Davis, because they really knew how to work the costumes and bring them to life.

CB How does working with Sofia compare to working with her father?

MC Both have a warm and human way of communicating, but Sofia gets much more involved in the look. Francis leaves you more to yourself but gives you an overall philosophical input that you really have to catch and understand, then leaves you on your own. Sofia, being a woman, and also being interested in fashion and the look of the movie, is more precise and detailed in expressing her vision. What makes them both Coppolas is they both have a gentle but firm way of dealing with me, and with the crew. There is a family touch there, but on the artistic level they each have their own vision and they follow it.

On the set of *Marie Antoinette*
Photography Francesca Brunori

Marie Antoinette is out in October 2006
from Sony Pictures/Columbia